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ABSTRACT

Alaska has made many attempts to find methods for providing a quality education for students living in rural areas. They include regional schools, boarding dormitories, the Boarding Home Program, area and local high schools, and correspondence study. This booklet discusses the strong and weak points relative to the major financial, social, legal, logistical, and educational factors which must be considered and includes a policy statement by the Alaska State Board of Education. The philosophy underlying these various attempts coincides with the Bureau of Indian Affairs plan to transfer their operating day schools to the State of Alaska as soon as it is economically feasible, thus eliminating the dual educational system in rural areas and placing the responsibility with the State. As a result of the information gathered concerning Alaska's efforts, local area high schools will be developed to allow students to complete up to 4 years of secondary education in their own locality. The scope of the curriculum will be more limited than the offerings of the large regional high schools, but all local and area high schools will give a general academic program of high quality, leading to a high school diploma. (HBC)

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THE BIG PICTURE ON SMALL SCHOOLS

THE ALASKA STATE BOARD of EDUCATION

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During the past ten years, one major educational problem in Alaska has consumed more time, effort and critical thinking than any others; that is, how can the State best meet its responsibility of providing a quality education for students living in rural areas of the State.

Many solutions have been suggested and tried: regional schools, boarding dormitories, the Boarding Home Program, area and local high schools, and correspondence study. There are strong and weak points to each.

This booklet is a discussion of the major financial, social, legal, logistical and educational factors which must be considered, and a policy statement by the Alaska State Board of Education.

We hope you find this publication informative. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to discuss these with a State Board member or the staff of the Department of Education. Additional copies of this publication may be requested from the Department's Office of Public Information and Publications.

Mrs. Katherine Hurley, Chairman
Alaska State Board of Education

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

Alaska has long recognized its responsibility to provide a quality secondary education program for students living in rural areas of the State. Since the late '50's and early '60's, State and federal agencies have been deliberating and legislating plans to meet this responsibility.

Initially, it was believed that high school students would have to leave their homes and attend large comprehensive secondary schools if they were to receive a quality education. Without adequate Territorial and, subsequently, State resources, students were sent to Bureau of Indian Affairs-operated boarding schools at Chemawa, Oregon; Chilocco, Oklahoma; and Mt. Edgecumbe in Sitka, Alaska.

Alaska's regional high school concept emerged during the early 60's as a solution for providing secondary education to rural students. It was, at the time, a popular concept because it would replace the Bureau of Indian Affairs practice of sending students far from their homes to federal boarding schools. Regional school planning called for establishing a system of large secondary boarding schools throughout the State. In the early planning stages, the Bureau of Indian Affairs agreed to construct the complementing dormitories at these regional sites and support their operating costs. This was in philosophical concert with the BIA's plan to transfer their operating day schools to the State as soon as it was economically feasible, thus eliminating the dual educational system in rural areas and placing the responsibility with the State.

The idea of large regional schools was reinforced when the State, in 1966, commissioned the Training Corporation of America to make a feasibility study as to the size and location of regional boarding schools. The report resulting from this study stated that regional schools with 1,000-student dormitories should be constructed at Fairbanks, Anchorage and Sitka and that smaller, 500-student facilities be constructed at Nome, Kodiak and Bethel. This was generally accepted as the developmental pattern through the mid-sixties by the Department of Education, Legislature and Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The first school and 168-student dormitory was opened in Nome in 1966 (Wm. E. Beltz Regional High School) and the second for 152 students at Kodiak (Kodiak—Aleutian Regional High School) in 1968. In 1972, the third regional school was completed at Bethel with boarding facilities for 200 students.

The Boarding Home Program was conceived in 1966 to serve the overflow of students that could not get into State-operated or BIA boarding schools. Under this program, students board in private homes in urban centers and attend the local high school. Enrollment in this program has grown from 110 students in 1967 to over 1,000 during the 1972 school year.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Even during the developmental period of Alaska's regional schools, several major social, political, technical and financial changes occurred which caused the desirability of the concept to be questioned. Such things as the formation of the boroughs under the Mandatory Borough Incorporation Act developed a number of district schools from what had formerly been rural schools operated by the State or the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Later events, such as the development of the Native Land claims and their ultimate settlement, brought about political sophistication on the part of many of the Native people in the rural areas. The oil lease sales appeared to promote the feasibility of a greatly expanded school system which could take advantage of technical innovation in education. Thus, the concept of the large comprehensive high school began to wane and more recognition was given to the possible advantages of the smaller school in the local setting using improved curriculums and multi-media approaches to education.

During the 1972 school year, more than 3,500 rural Alaskan students were enrolled in State and BIA high school programs. The gradual development of small local high schools allowed approximately 1,300 students to continue in a sound high school program in their hometowns or villages. Although the Boarding Home Program has expanded to absorb 1,067 students, nearly 900 young Alaskans were still attending federal boarding high schools; half of these, or 444 students, had to leave the state to attend school in Oregon or Oklahoma. The Mt. Edgecumbe BIA boarding school accommodated over 400 students. And, after 10 years of planning and construction, for a total of 8 million in State and federal funds, only 312 rural Alaskan youngsters were enrolled in regional high schools.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

The high cost of school construction in rural Alaska alone warrants careful consideration of the regional school concept. In addition, the State has learned through the operation of the two regional school dormitories that had been established during the mid-sixties at Nome and Kodiak, that operating costs are extremely high, averaging nearly $4,000 per student per year; and, they continue to rise.

A close look at the actual and projected expenditures for regional schools, the boarding home program, and local secondary schools will show us the relatively high costs of dormitory operations. In the following table, the estimated costs of boarding school programs are nearly double those of local high school programs.

An additional factor negating the feasibility of large regional school dormitories has recently come to light. The extremely high operational costs of the regional school dormitories have, to date, been supported by the Bureau of Indian Affairs from Johnson-O'Malley funds. However, the total national appropriation of JOM funds in 1972 was only $22.5 million, and projected dormitory costs in Alaska alone for 1975 exceed $8 million. Thus, there will be increasing difficulty in obtaining sufficient federal support to operate quality dormitory programs. To maintain high quality dormitories, additional State funds will have to be appropriated.

Local rural high schools, on the other hand, while small and thus having higher educational costs per pupil, do not have a dormitory cost and the total program can be operated for an estimated $3,000 per student as opposed to over $6,000 per student for the combined dormitory and educational costs in a regional school.

ROUGH ANNUAL OPERATING COST COMPARISONS*

OPERATION

Costs/Pupil/Year	Regional	Area	B.H.P.	Local
Instruction	$2,000	$2,500	$1,500	$3,000
Domiciliary	4,000	2,000	2,000	—
	$6,000	$4,500	$3,500	$3,000
Total for 900 students	$5,400,000	$4,050,000	$3,150,000	$2,700,000

*900 Pupils = number of pupils in Mt. Edgecumbe, Oregon or Oklahoma during the 1971-72 school year.

ROUGH CONSTRUCTION COST COMPARISONS*

REGIONAL SCHOOL (192 students)

	Per School	Per Pupil
Added Educational Facilities	$1,450,000	$ 7,552
Dormitory Costs	$3,000,000	$15,652
Total	$4,450,000	$23,177

For 900 Pupils = $20,860,000

AREA SCHOOL (100 students)

New Educational Facilities	$1,250,000	$12,500
40 Pupil Dormitory	$ 400,000	$10,000
(60 local pupils)	ø	ø
Total	$1,650,000	$16,500

For 900 Pupils = $14,850,000

LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL (60 students)

Educational Facilities	$ 750,000	$12,500

For 900 Pupils = $11,250,000

*900 Pupils = number of pupils in Mt. Edgecumbe, Oregon or Oklahoma during the 1971-72 school year.

OTHER FACTORS NEGATING THE REGIONAL SCHOOL CONCEPT

Even more important than fiscal considerations are the effects on the psychological and emotional well-being of living in large dormitory facilities. After only a few brief years of dormitory operations, educators, psychologists and social workers began to look askance at placing the young adolescent in the complex social environment within the large dormitory. The most obvious consequence of being away from home is the ailment common to most boarding students—"homesickness." In addition to adjusting to urban society with all of its unfamiliar customs, dormitory students are confronted with a barrage of complex policies and procedures for which they often see no reason. The regimentation of a large dormitory appears as an alien and hostile world to the children. Their sense of alienation adds further uncertainty to their lives. It is indeed difficult for young students to leave their families for nine months each year and co-exist with others having similar difficulties in large dormitory situations.

Rural Alaskan parents are no happier than their children with the regional school system. Their discontent is becoming increasingly more vocal. During September of 1971 the State Board of Education conducted hearings at Bethel, St. Mary's, Emmonak, Holy Cross and Aniak regarding the future of high schools in these areas. Testimony taken during these hearings, and at numerous Department of Education meetings around the state, clearly indicate that the majority of parents want their children closer to home for their secondary education—even closer than the proposed regional high schools. Indeed, they would like them educated in the local community if possible, even at the expense of having a more limited program.

Since the initiation of the first regional school dormitory construction, native Alaskans have developed as a more effective political and social force, and the various Native associations have created the format for more local involvement in resolving educational problems affecting rural communities. In January of 1972, the Tanana Chiefs adopted resolutions requesting that the funds scheduled for large dormitory construction be reprogrammed to build area high schools in the Tanana Valley. The Fairbanks Native

Association has requested that an immediate program, seeking federal, State and local funds, be implemented to provide secondary schools in those villages presently without facilities and that an orderly expansion of the existing secondary schools in the larger rural communities be started. *Thus, the unilateral decision-making by State and Federal agencies began giving way to collective deliberation by those most closely affected.*

As early as 1969, the Alaska Chapter of the National Education Association began pointing out the inadequacies of regional boarding school facilities in meeting the psychological and emotional needs of the students. Resolution No. 5 of the 1969 NEA/Alaska Delegate Assembly recommended to State and federal agencies that only small, "family unit type" housing be used in future boarding programs for Alaskan students. The provision of educational programs in rural areas of the State was named by NEA/Alaska as a priority policy in 1969. Alaska teachers and administrators, through their education association, have repeatedly refuted the large boarding dormitory concept. The development of the community school concept and the use of small unit housing in all future boarding facilities were established as Association goals in 1970 and reaffirmed in 1971 and 1972.

A CHANGING PHILOSOPHY

In view of the many negative aspects of the regional school concept, the Department of Education began in the late 1960's to think in terms of expanding local day schools to the 9th and 10th grades (and to four-year programs if enrollments justified it) or implementation of area high schools with small boarding facilities for clusters of villages not large enough to justify their own local high schools. Area high school sites would be designated by the State Board of Education and supplemental facilities, including multi-purpose rooms, media centers, student cottages, and staff quarters, constructed to meet the needs of the students in the area.

In December of 1968, members of the Alaska congressional delegation called a special meeting in Sitka to discuss the proposed regional school construction program. The meeting resulted in a basic change in the regional school concept—that is, from the large complexes earlier identified by the Training Corporation of America report into smaller facilities supported by area high schools. Bureau of Indian Affairs funds were to be reprogrammed into expanding the classroom space at Kotzebue and Barrow and constructing smaller student dormitories. The Department of Education then revised its construction schedule to include small (60 to 80 student) facilities at Tok, Fort Yukon and Dillingham.

IN FAVOR OF SMALL LOCAL HIGH SCHOOLS

There are several collateral advantages in the shift in concept from large regional school complexes to local and area schools. One of the most significant is the increased capability for adult education and community involvement. Building schools in a number of communities, as opposed to one large central complex, will afford educational opportunity to a far greater number of adults to increase their skills and training. This increase in adult opportunity should have a significant effect on both the community's and the students' attitudes toward school.

Parents testifying before State Board of Education hearings felt strongly that with area schools close to home, fewer students would drop out of high school; those who did would be more likely to re-enter school and continue their education.

Another significant fact that will have a far-reaching effect on secondary programs in rural Alaska is the regional corporate structure designated in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The 12 regional corporations more nearly lend themselves to eventual development into geographic and ethnically related, political self-governing entities. Large regional schools serving students from a number of communities—especially when located in an organized district—raise problems of governance and representation. Under present statutes, there is no way for communities who send their children to a regional school to have a voice in the school's operation or policies. The regional corporations of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act will have greater capability for local school control than the original regional school areas as outlined in earlier thinking. Thus, local and area high schools could eventually have more manageable and responsive operational units.

1972 Legislative Action

The small area and local school concept was given legislative endorsement during the 1972 session with the passage of an Act providing for the issuance of $16,000,000 in general obligation bonds to support area schools. Signed by the Governor on July 7, 1972, Chapter 197 authorizes submitting to the voters in the next general election the question of whether the State should issue these bonds for the construction of rural school facilities. If approved, an important effect of the funds will be to increase the State's capacity to provide more local secondary programs, thereby decreasing the necessity for additional boarding facilities.

In anticipation of a favorable reception by Alaska voters in November of 1972, the Department is presently making preliminary site investigations and developing programs and facility plans. Working with the University of Alaska, the Institute of Social, Governmental and Economic Research, architectural firms and other agencies familiar with the needs of rural Alaska, Department staff are designing curriculum programs and physical plants so that they may serve the widest possible range, from elementary and secondary education through adult programs. The intent is to pull the area school away from the restricted offerings common to educational systems and to integrate the school into the social and economic life of the community or area.

The State Board of Education has, to date, designated Aniak, Emmonak, Mt. Village and Kiana as area school sites.

Legal Considerations

A case brought in 1971 against the State Board of Education and the Board of Directors of State-Operated Schools in the Superior Court of the State of Alaska and a recent opinion of the Alaska Attorney General have brought to light important legal considerations of the regional school *vs.* local school question.

The civil action was brought on behalf of five ninth grade students in Kivalina who did not have a secondary program available to them and who claimed they were entitled to public school classes in their home village under State laws, the Constitution of Alaska and of the United States. The case cited specifically AS 14.14.110 which requires the State Board of Education to provide classes for any secondary school represented by more than five pupils. Cooperative or boarding arrangements may be made only on a voluntary basis.

An actual decision on the Kivalina case was never reached since the court postponed final action by request of the State. In obtaining a postponement, the Department of Education and the State-Operated School System were required to submit to the court evidence that they were making reasonable progress in providing local educational programs for pupils who otherwise did not have daily access to schools on a non-boarding basis.

An opinion by the Alaska Attorney General issued in November, 1971, stated that correspondence courses are generally not felt to be a comparable alternative to live classroom experience and alone would not meet the constitutional and legal requirements of "providing an educational program."

As required by the court, the Department of Education and the State-Operated School System implemented a secondary school program at Kivalina. The Department then developed and published two guidelines pertaining to small high school construction and the scope of educational programs for small secondary schools. Finally, new regulations were promulgated pertaining to minimum standards for secondary programs. The new Department of Education regulations were written to clarify the existing state laws and to reaffirm the right of Alaska school children to be educated in their home communities, whether in a city district, a borough district, or the State-Operated School System (4 AAC 06. 020.). Boarding arrangements may be made to enable students to obtain a more comprehensive education than provided in the State minimum standards. However, enrollment in programs which require a pupil to live away from his usual home is voluntary only (4 AAC 06.025.). The minimum standards for offering secondary education listed in the Department of Education Regulations, effective in May of 1972, have been included in the Appendix.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Based on the present enrollments in rural elementary schools, we can expect high school enrollments to exceed 4,500 by 1975. Local secondary schools presently in operation can absorb nearly 1,500 of these students, leaving approximately 3,000 without access to a local secondary program. The figures in Table I, based on a straight line projection of the actual enrollments in rural elementary schools, show the number of 8th grade graduates who will be ready to enter high school in the fall of each year. The totals indicate the entire high school age population in 1975. Clearly, additional local secondary programs must be initiated if the State is to meet its constitutional and statutory responsibility of providing a free public education for all school age children.

TABLE I – SECONDARY STUDENTS IN RURAL ALASKA

		1972	1973	1974	1975	Total
STUDENTS ENTERING 9TH GRADE	State	644	691	651	773	2,759
	BIA	363	434	512	508	1,817
		1,007	1,125	1,163	1,281	4,576
STUDENTS HAVING LOCAL SCHOOLS	State	306	295	293	325	1,219
	BIA	51	61	48	60	220
		357	356	341	385	1,439
STUDENTS WITH NO LOCAL SCHOOL	State	338	396	358	448	1,540
	BIA	312	373	464	448	1,597
		650	769	822	896	3,137

The existing regional school dormitories at Bethel, Kodiak and Nome will house 468 of the more than 3,000 rural students without access to a local secondary program. Additional spaces at the proposed Fairbanks regional dormitory and the area schools proposed for Dillingham, Fort Yukon, Tok and Aniak will bring the total boarding capacity up to 858 by 1975. The challenge to the State, then, is to provide local secondary school programs for more than 2,000 rural Alaska students by 1975.

Presently there are more than 20 rural communities in district and State-operated schools which offer quality high school programs for less than 100 pupils. Five of these—Kivalina, Gustavus, Hydaburg, Pelican and Cape Pole—have a total secondary enrollment of less than 10 pupils. Despite the arguments of the 60's, today it is educationally, logistically, and financially sound to initiate local high school programs in rural Alaska.

Table III lists the State-operated and Bureau of Indian Affairs elementary schools whose student populations in grades 5 through 8 are large enough to warrant the implementation of local high schools. Taking these into consideration, Table IV shows a new, more optimistic picture of secondary education in rural Alaska. If the needed local high schools are implemented by 1975, only about 800 students would be left unhoused. These students could easily be picked up by a smaller, higher-quality boarding home program. (Presently, the Boarding Home Program enrollment exceeds 1,000 students.) Thus, building additional large regional school dormitories would not only conflict with the wishes of the students, parents, educators, native organizations and professionals in rural Alaska, it would be unnecessary and, in view of the high construction costs, fiscally irresponsible on the part of the State.

TABLE II – DORMITORY SPACES BY 1975

Regional Schools		Area Schools	
Beltz	168	Dillingham	80
Kodiak	100*	Fort Yukon	60
Bethel	200	Tok	60
Fairbanks	150	Aniak	40
		TOTAL	858

*152-student capacity; local district utilizes some spaces.

TABLE III – POTENTIAL LOCAL HIGH SCHOOLS*

State:		BIA:	
Angoon	53	Wainwright	41
Manokotak	33	Nunapitchuk	41
New Stuyahok	39	Pilot Station	32
Nondalton	35	Quinhagak	33
Noorvik	54	Savoonga	37
Northway	46	Tununak	27
Pt. Hope	28	Unalakleet	67
Selawik	58	Akiachak	27
Togiak	51	Alakanuk	38
Subtotal	397	Barrow	210
		Chevak	64
		Emmonak	62
		Gambell	40
		Hooper Bay	72
		Kasigluk	39
		Kiana	35
		Kipnuk	45
		Kotlik	26
		Kwethluk	43
		Mekoruk	26
		Mountain Village	61
		Subtotal	1,066

TOTAL ———— 1,463

*Table indicates number of pupils in grades 5-8.

TABLE IV – STUDENT PLACEMENT IN RURAL ALASKA

Total number of pupils (Table I)	4,576
Access to local programs (Table I)	(1,439)
Dormitory spaces by 1975	(858)
Potential local high schools	(1,463)
Unhoused pupils	816

A BALANCED SET OF OPTIONS

The State's position at this time, in view of the information now available, is to discontinue any further development of more large regional high school complexes in favor of the local and area high school program. Future planning and development will be based on the following:

- Continued operation of the regional schools and dormitories at Nome, Kodiak and Bethel.

- Implementation of the committed area school academic programs and facilities scheduled for Dillingham, Tok, and Fort Yukon and the regional school dormitory at Fairbanks.

- Expansion of the Boarding Home Program until the potential local and area school programs are completed. The Boarding Home Program should allow the needed spaces and flexibility until this can be achieved. However, this may entail assisting local school districts with additional construction to handle the impact.

- The Department of Education, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and State-Operated Schools joint replanning of the expenditure of BIA funds (which were formerly scheduled for proposed dormitory construction) and State funds to provide for expansion of the larger rural day schools to include secondary programs where practical.

- Construction of supplemental facilities at sites designated by the State Board of Education as area high schools.

Under this policy, the Department of Education will strive to develop a balanced set of options for rural secondary education programs. Local and area high schools will be developed to allow students to complete up to four years of secondary education in their own locality. The scope of the curriculum will be more limited than the offerings of the large regional high schools, but all local and area high schools will give a general academic program of high quality, leading to a high school diploma.

A second option available to rural students will be to attend a larger regional high school. Regional high schools will offer a comprehensive secondary curriculum, including college preparatory courses, extensive vocational programs, and bi-cultural programs designed to meet the needs of the boarding students.

As the number of local high schools increases, the Boarding Home Program will be limited to students requiring special programs. These would include, for example, students desiring to study a specific subject in depth which might be offered only in a particular school district, students with special medical or social problems, and students with other special needs as determined by their local education advisory committee. With decreasing enrollments, the Boarding Home Program will become more selective and the quality of the program and its supplemental services will increase.

THE SMALL HIGH SCHOOL – A NEW ADVENTURE IN CURRICULUM PLANNING

Advances in educational technology over the past decade have shown that the small secondary program need no longer be considered as a scaled-down, limited version of a larger high school. Educational television, programmed texts, and a proliferation of media and materials have made the small high school, in many ways, superior to its large urban counterpart. Pilot small high school programs are now underway in several Alaska locations which use video tapes, slide presentations and a variety of self-instructional packages. Small enrollments allow greater flexibility for students to conduct independent study or experiments and research. While a multitude of materials, equipment and visual aids are presently available for self-instruction, much can be developed by the school staff to fit the local situation.

Special instruction can be combined with the traditional subjects, each taught for a part of the day. A wide variety of vocational courses such as fishing, navigation and small motor repairs can be taught on a half-day basis with year-long classes counting as two or three units.

Small high schools can profitably make use of correspondence courses. When only one student needs a specific course, when students wish to take courses in subjects in which the teacher is not prepared, and when electives become too numerous for the teacher to handle, correspondence courses may be obtained. The teacher acts as a supervisor and the student is able to work at his own pace and use equipment available in the school.

Adult and community education opportunities can be greatly expanded through the small high school. Academic classes on both the elementary and secondary levels can be taught in the school facilities. Adult Basic Education and correspondence courses have been developed for residents of outlying areas. The school can be used for a variety of community interest programs such as consumer and health education, homemaking and child care, tax accounting, typing, English and many others. Adult, child and teacher interaction is the key to the program's success.

Costs of a small school program are not beyond reach. Although many different kinds of materials and supplies are needed, normally only one or two of each item is necessary. Individualized instruction allows students and their parents to work on different subjects at different times, sharing texts and materials.

The small high school program today need no longer be equated with an inferior education. The small high school can use the resources of the entire school, community and student body to help each student develop into a mature, self-confident, cooperative individual with the skills necessary to assume responsibility in a modern world. The Department of Education now has developed manuals and guidelines specifically for small, rural high schools and stands ready to assist Alaska communities in developing their programs.